

In the 21 years that I have been here, the most successful farm legislation has been bipartisan farm legislation. The most successful farm legislation has been that where we have worked together. There are a lot of issues in this, from the normal crops to issues of nutrition, conservation, reserve areas, which are very important to me. I know that the only kind of legislation we are ever actually going to see go into law is something we all work together on.

I commend Senator DOLE and Senator DASCHLE and Senator LUGAR and others for working so hard to bring us together. I think we will shortly be in a position to put before the body a piece of legislation that we can at least all vote cloture on and then go on in the normal course of things on the farm bill.

But I commend those Senators again on both sides of the aisle who have been willing to work together on legislation to protect the farmers of our country, to require the production of food and fiber and allow family farms to continue, but also to protect the environment of this country and to feed the people of this country through the nutrition programs. Those programs work best when we come together to pass it. I think we are coming very close to that.

I thank the distinguished majority leader for yielding to me.

THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS BILL

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I think the Senator from Iowa has a legitimate request here. We are trying to clarify that now with the Senator from South Dakota. If we can do that, then we will start the debate on the telecommunications bill. I have read the colloquy. I do not see any problem with it. But I am not on the committee. I am not the committee chairman. So I hope we can work that out.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. BUMPERS. Mr. President, will the majority leader yield for a question?

The majority leader may have already covered this. I am concerned about this. I am vitally interested in the farm bill. I have no objection whatever going to the telecommunications bill. But if at some point this afternoon some sort of a compromise is reached, I hope that we will not have any difficulty setting the telecommunications bill aside and then get back to the farm bill and, hopefully, dispose of it this evening.

Mr. DOLE. We would like to dispose of it this evening. We are hoping there can be an agreement and that we have 80 votes on cloture—not 61 or 59, or whatever. I know some Members have to depart fairly soon. We are trying to accommodate everyone. It is difficult to do. But I think they are meeting as we speak in a bipartisan group.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, if the leader will yield, his staff, mine, Senator LUGAR's, and Senator DASCHLE's are meeting. I think we are going to have very soon a package on the farm bill before us, at least the original package most of us can vote for and, obviously, subject to amendment after that. But the desire, I think, of the principals—those of us on both sides of the aisle who are handling this—is to get something that we can compress in time, if at all possible, and protect the legitimate interests reflected not only geographically but politically.

Mr. BUMPERS. My concern, Mr. President, to the majority leader was, I wish we could incorporate into the unanimous-consent request that the majority leader will have a right to automatically set the telecommunications bill aside. I do not want somebody to object to that and get us bogged down here so that we cannot get back to the farm bill.

Mr. DOLE. I will assure the Senator I am interested, too, just as the Senator from Arkansas is. If we get bogged down on this, we could set it aside. We have regular order to bring it back.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1996—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the absence of the official papers—they are somewhere else—the Senate now turn to the consideration of the conference report to accompany S. 652, the telecommunications bill, and the conference report be considered read.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

The report will be stated.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the House to the bill S. 652, to provide for a procompetitive, deregulatory national policy framework designed to accelerate rapid private sector deployment of advanced telecommunications and information technologies and services to all Americans by opening all telecommunications markets to competition, and for other purposes, having met, after full and free conference, have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses this report, signed by a majority of the conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of January 31, 1996.)

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PRESSLER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THOMPSON). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. PRESSLER. Mr. President, it is with a sense of relief and pride that we bring to the Senate floor the conference report on the telecommunications bill. I wish to commend my colleague, Senator HOLLINGS, for his outstanding leadership and bipartisan spirit throughout this debate. This long debate has brought us to the point today where we have a conference report that is very positive. It is procompetitive and deregulatory. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 will get everybody into everybody else's business.

The purpose of this bill is to update the 1934 Communications Act. This is the first complete rewrite of the telecommunications law in our country. It is very much needed.

I predict that this will be succeeded someday as we get into the wireless age by another act, maybe in 10 or 15 years. But this Telecommunications Act will provide us with a road map into the wireless age and into the next century.

Mr. President, what has occurred in our country is that through court decisions and through the 1934 act we have developed an economic apartheid regarding telecommunications, that is, the regional Bell companies have the local telephone service, the long-distance companies have the long-distance service, the cable companies have their section, the broadcast companies have their section.

This bill attempts to get everybody into everybody else's business and let in new entrants. For example, at President Clinton's recent White House conference on small business many small business people wrote and said, we want the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to pass because it will allow small business people to get into local telephone service, it will allow small business people to get into different segments of telecommunications.

Mr. President, this conference report we bring here today is a vast bill. It covers everything from the rules of entry into local telephone service by other competitors—it deals with long distance, it deals with cable, it deals with broadcast, it deals with the public utilities getting into telecommunications, it deals with burglar alarm issues, it deals with the authority of State and local governments over their rights of way, and it deals with the rules of satellite communication.

It will result in many things for consumers. For example, I believe it will accelerate an explosion of new devices, an explosion of new investment. What has happened in our country is that we have forced our regional Bell companies to invest overseas because we limit what they can manufacture. We have limited many of our companies in what they can do in our country. This legislation unleashes them, makes them competitive and is deregulatory in nature.

It will do a great deal for consumers. For example, and specifically, it will lower prices on local telephone calls

through competition. It will lower prices on long-distance calls through competition. It will lower cable TV rates through competition. It will provide an explosion of new devices, services and inventions.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, will the distinguished Senator from South Dakota yield? I hate to interrupt.

Mr. PRESSLER. I do yield.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, we have a unanimous-consent agreement I believe we are ready to enter. It is a very important effort to complete this legislation.

After consultation with the Democratic leadership, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be 90 minutes on the conference report to be equally divided in the usual form, and following the conclusion or yielding back of the time, the Senate proceed to the adoption of the conference report without any intervening action or debate.

Mr. FORD. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, I ask that my friend allow the ranking Member to have equal time for what the chairman has had, say 5 minutes, and add that to that.

Mr. LOTT. I amend my unanimous-consent request to that effect.

Mr. FORD. I thank my friend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LOTT. I thank the Senator for yielding.

Mr. PRESSLER. I thank my colleagues and my colleague from Kentucky.

So, Mr. President, this bill is an industrial restructuring. It will be like the Oklahoma land rush because many investors have not had a road map as to what to do. It will mean we will be more competitive internationally, and it will mean many of our companies can form alliances internationally.

Some have said, well, will this just allow one or two companies to take everything over? No, it will not. I think it will prove to be the age of the small, nimble business. I believe that we will see small businesses emerging. We have seen AT&T break up into three companies. I think that is going to happen more and more.

This bill does not affect our antitrust laws. The antitrust laws stay in place. But this bill will encourage small, nimble companies and entrepreneurs to enter the telecommunications area.

It will also bring us to a point where many of our companies that have not been able to get into other areas can do so. For example, the public utilities will be able to get into telecommunications.

What does this mean to the average consumer? I have already mentioned I think it will mean lower prices through competition. It also will mean many new devices for senior citizens who

might be living alone and want to summon emergency help with some of the wireless technologies that will be available. They can stay in their own homes longer with the security of mind of being able to call for help by pushing a button.

For the home, I believe we will see the computer and TV and telephone blended into one source of education, news, and entertainment. For the small town hospital, it will mean telemedicine, new devices and investment, where a large hospital can partner with a small hospital in research.

For the small business located in a smaller town, it will mean that a small businessman there will be on an equal footing with a bigger businessman in an urban center in terms of access to research and the ability to partner.

As a member of the Finance Committee, I have asked my staff to help find ways that when big universities get a research grant for cancer research, for example, that they use telecommunications to partner with a small university. That will make the research more accurate at lower cost.

So there are a number of benefits to consumers, farmers, small business people, and universities. There are many new devices that will come online that we have not even heard of yet. This bill will be like the Oklahoma land rush in terms of investment, inventions and development. We have just begun imagining what the telecommunications revolution will be like.

This will be the starting gun. We have kept our companies in bondage. Those companies will break free and there will be a whole group of new small entrepreneurs coming forth to participate in the telecommunications revolution.

Another area that it will help our country is jobs. This is the biggest jobs bill ever to pass this Congress. It will result in a creation of thousands of jobs, good jobs, good-paying jobs across our country.

We read about layoffs every day, but they are frequently in industries that have grown obsolete. This bill will allow an unleashing of new high-technology jobs in the information age. And it is very important.

This bill is a jobs bill without spending any Federal money. It will go down in history as the largest jobs bill in American history.

So, Mr. President, I shall, to save time, because I know some of my colleagues wish to speak—I want to pay tribute to both the Republicans and Democrats who have worked on this bipartisan bill, to my colleague, Senator HOLLINGS, to my colleague, Senator DASCHLE, who is on the floor, and many others on both sides of the aisle, Republicans and Democrats.

This is a bipartisan bill. It has been all the way through the Senate. First of all, this bill has been simmering for many years. We have worked on it first in the Senate and then in the House. There were bipartisan staff meetings.

We have brought the White House into the conference discussions. I spoke with President Clinton and Vice President GORE on a number of occasions throughout this process. I thank them for their participation. Mr. Simon of Vice President GORE's staff was a guest speaker at the conference staff's first meeting. We invited him so we could bring this together on a bipartisan basis.

This bill is not one that could be partisan. I think it is one of the most bipartisan pieces of legislation in the Congress. Mr. President, I shall have additional remarks as time goes on. I yield the floor.

Mr. HOLLINGS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. HOLLINGS. Mr. President, today the Senate considers the conference agreement to S. 652, the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This bill is intended to promote competition in every sector of the communications industry, including the broadcast, cable, wireless, long distance, local telephone, manufacturing, pay telephone, electronic publishing, cable equipment, and direct broadcast satellite industries. This legislation has the support of the Clinton administration and almost every sector of the communications industry. I urge my colleagues to pass this comprehensive legislation.

Mr. President, this conference agreement comes before the Senate for final passage after years of debate. In 1991, I authored legislation to allow the Regional Bell Operating Companies [RBOC's] into manufacturing. That bill passed the Senate by almost 3/4 of the Senate, but the House could not pass it. Several other bills were offered, but at each stage, one industry blocked the other. As a result, communications policy has been set by the courts, not by Congress and not by the Federal Communications Commission [FCC], the expert agency.

In 1994, I introduced S. 1822, the Communications Act of 1994, which contained the most comprehensive revision of the communications law since 1934. In that year, the committee held 31 hours of testimony in 11 days of hearings from 86 witnesses. Though that bill was reported by the Commerce Committee by a vote of 18 to 2, there was not enough time in the 103d Congress to complete our work.

Senator PRESSLER and I decided earlier this year to pick up where we left off in the last Congress. We jointly introduced S. 652 early in 1995 and succeeded in passing the bill out of the Commerce Committee by a vote of 17-2 on March 23 of last year. The bill passed the Senate in June by an overwhelming vote of 81-18. After the House passed its version of the legislation in August, the two Houses entered into the difficult task of reconciling the two bills over several months through the fall and winter.

I am pleased that the conferees have succeeded in reconciling these bills. I